

1: Holmberg--16 [4]
116, 411, 237, 825

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

"The arrow is now ready for feathering. For this purpose only two kinds of feathers (eo) are used, except in case of emergency. All chonta-headed arrows are feathered with the large wing or quill feathers of the curassow, while bamboo-headed arrows are feathered with the large wing feathers of the harpy eagle. Informants were emphatic in stating that these are the only feathers ever used, and it was rare that I saw an arrow feathered otherwise. Occasionally, however, the feathers of one of the smaller varieties of guan are used.

Feathering is done by the Peruvian cemented technique. Before a feather is put on, however, about 5 inches of the arrow shaft, below the lashing which secures the plug containing the nock, is coated with hot beeswax. Then the aftershafts of a feather are removed (the mandible, containing teeth, of the palometa fish is used for this purpose) and placed over the soft beeswax along the shaft and in line with the nock. They are then lashed by winding at intervals between the barbs of the feather a very fine thread taken from a grasslike plant growing near rivers, called di'íbi. Nowadays, when available, manufactured cotton thread is considered ideal for this purpose. After the feathers have been glued and lashed to the arrow shaft, the beeswax is smoothed out by rubbing a wet thumbnail over it."



"Next in importance to uruku for decorative purposes are various bright-colored feathers (éó) which are glued into the hair with prepared beeswax (iríti). Like uruku, feathers are extensively employed to decorate the hair on festive occasions. It is important to note that the same types of feathers are always used no matter what the occasion may be: a birth, a death, a drinking feast, or a bloodletting rite. Those employed come from the toucan (red feathers from the back, yellow feathers from the breast, and white feathers from under the wings), from the curassow (downy white breast feathers), and from the harpy eagle (also the downy white breast feathers). Although there are many other brightly colored birds in the area—the macaw, for instance—the types mentioned above were the only ones I ever saw used for decorative purposes. The underlying reasons for this, other than that the ancestors had followed the same pattern, I was never able to ascertain.

It is the women who pluck the feathers, prepare them into tufts, and glue them into the hair. In the case of the toucan, when the bird is killed the breast skin is always removed with the feathers, which are later plucked for decoration. In the case of the other birds mentioned, the desirable feathers are plucked after the dead animal has been brought to the house. The tufts are made by first binding 8 or 10 of the down feathers together at the base with a piece of cotton string or bark fiber and then covering the binding with prepared beeswax. The tufts are glued to the hair by first softening the beeswax with a firebrand.

1: Holmberg--19 [5]

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono-2

116, 825, 301

In addition to tufts of feathers, bunches of quills of the peccary, porcupine, and paca are sometimes glued into the hair of young boys so as to make them good hunters of these animals when they grow up. "

1: Holmberg--19-20,
116, 301, 825, 462, 777

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

"Necklaces (éwi) are worn both for adornment and for magical reasons. Animal teeth are especially favored in necklace making. When a coati is killed and after it has been cooked and eaten, the eye teeth are extracted with the fingers and small holes are gouged out in the roots of the teeth by the men, who employ for this purpose an eye tooth of a rat, a squirrel, or a paca hafted to the humerus of a howler monkey. After a sufficient number of teeth (no specified number) have been obtained, they are strung on a piece of cotton [20] or bark-fiber string by the women. The penis bone of the coati or the gristle from the back of the ankle of the harpy eagle is sometimes added as a charm to these necklaces, which are worn especially by parents during the couvade period following birth."

"Less often employed for making necklaces are the eye teeth of the spider monkey, which are drilled in the manner described above. Necklaces are sometimes made from the molar teeth of the peccary and the coati, but in such cases holes are not drilled in the teeth; they are merely tied to string which is placed around the teeth between the roots.

The hard black seeds of the chonta palm and toenails of the tortoise are sometimes drilled in the manner described above and are used for making necklaces. The base of the quill feathers of various birds, especially the parrot, the macaw, the harpy eagle, and the toucan, are also similarly employed. In the case of the toucan the windpipe may be dried, cut into sections, and strung into necklaces. Other products employed for making necklaces include small sections of young chuchio (the reed employed in arrow making), old hair wrapped in cotton string, sections of umbilical cord (also wrapped in cotton string and covered with beeswax), and even parts of discarded pipe stems. "

"The few tapirs that are killed are usually shot while they are asleep. They are often detected by a short shrill whistle which they make at this time. They may also sometimes be located by the call of a small bird, known to the Siriono as eakwantui iča, which accompanies the tapir and lives largely by eating the wood ticks from its body. The call of this bird is a clear sign to the Indian that there is a tapir not far away. Once the sleeping animal is discovered, the hunter sneaks up quietly to within a few feet and shoots it in the heart with a lanceolate bamboo-headed arrow. If a feeding tapir is discovered in the daytime, the hunter conceals himself in the brush nearby and whistles like another tapir until the animal comes within range of his bow. He then aims for the heart and having released his arrow gives rapid chase until the bleeding animal falls."

"The Siriono possess no domesticated animals. Even the dog has not been introduced to the groups still wandering in the forest, although its existence is known through some individuals who have had contact with the outside. The general reaction to the dog, by those Indians who had had no contact with it, was one of extreme fear. This is not to be wondered at since the dog and the jaguar are called by the same term, yákwa. When I asked informants why the two were called by the same name, they invariably called my attention to the similarity between the footprint of a jaguar and that of the dog."

1: Holmberg--32 [3]
116, 262, 784, 825

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

"With the exception of snakes and insects, almost everything edible in the environment contributes to the food supply. The reason for not eating snake meat, however, does not rest on magical or religious grounds; the Siriono believe, since a snake is able to kill by poison, that anyone who eats snake meat is also apt to be poisoned. This taboo applies not only to all poisonous snakes, such as the bushmaster and the rattler, but is generalized to include even nonpoisonous anacondas, which often reach a length of 20 feet and could contribute considerable meat to the food supply."

"I was presented with two favorable opportunities to break down the taboo on snake meat, but in both cases the experiments failed. In the first instance, I killed a bush-master about 8 feet in length just outside of the house. Since I was badly in need of a waterproof pouch in which to carry my powder and shot, I decided to remove the hide and to try to make one. While skinning [33] the reptile, I noticed that it was particularly fat, and since I had no oil with which to keep my arms greased I decided to fry some snake fat for this purpose. Also, since I had never had the opportunity, I decided to taste some of the meat. I made a point of frying a large steak in front of the Indians so that they could readily observe everything that was going on; and after this was done I sat down in a hammock and ate it in full view of the chief, who had not only warned me not to eat it but who, I am sure, expected me to drop dead at any moment. Fortunately, no ill effects resulted. On the following day I ate some more, but though I tried my best, I was unable to get a single Indian to try a piece of the meat. Some days later I had occasion to bake some corn muffins, and since I had no lard at the time I decided to make them with snake grease. After they were done the chief came around, and I offered him one. He began contentedly to munch it. After he had eaten about half, I could not resist the temptation to tell him that the muffins contained snake fat, whereupon he immediately jumped out of the hammock, put his finger down his throat, and threw up every bit of the muffin he had eaten. For weeks afterward he reminded me of the trick I had played upon him and was skeptical of eating any food that I offered him until he was certain that the snake fat was gone."

1: Holmberg--33
116, 262, 825, 123

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

"On the second occasion, my Bolivian companion, Silva, killed an anaconda of about 20 feet in length. Conditions for introducing snake meat at the time were favorable since little game had been secured for several days. But even under these circumstances although I myself again set the example, I was unable to convince my Indian companions to try it. They showed no compunction, however, about either hunting or eating the buzzards which fed on the carcass of the snake, and for several days thereafter buzzard became a prominent part of their diet."

"Theoretically, a man is not supposed to eat the flesh of an animal which he kills himself. If a hunter violates this taboo, it is believed that the animal which he has eaten will not return to be hunted by him again. Continued breaches of this taboo are consequently supposed to be followed automatically by the sanction of ill-luck in hunting. This rule may formerly have been an effective mechanism by means of which to force reciprocity in the matter of game distribution, but if so, it has certainly lost its function today, for the disparity between the rule and its practice is very great indeed. Few hunters pay any attention to the rule at all, and when they do it is only with respect to larger animals, such as the tapir and the harpy eagle, that are rarely bagged anyway. In the case of smaller animals, such as coati and monkeys, I never saw hunters show any reluctance to eating those that they had killed themselves. Embúta, one of my older informants, told me that when he was a boy he never used to eat any of the game that he killed, but that nowadays the custom had changed and that it was no longer possible to expect meat from someone else who hunted it. It thus seems that through a gradual process of change hunters have discovered that eating their own game does not necessarily result in poorer luck in hunting but, rather, in greater satisfaction to the hunger drive. The reinforcing experience of eating one's own game has thus caused a partial breakdown in an old tribal custom."

1: Holmberg--37 [4]
116, 261, 276, 825

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

"All smoking is done in the house. It is considered bad form to smoke while on the hunt, as it is believed that animals will be driven away by the smell. Most smoking thus takes place while the Siriono are resting in the hammock or having drinking feasts, and hunters almost always smoke immediately after returning from the forest to stave off hunger until they are given some food."

1: Holmberg--44 [4]
116, 533, 123, 825

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

"When I was first with the Indians I forced myself to leave a comfortable hammock and mosquito net many times at about 3 a.m., and, with flashlight, pencil, and notebook in hand, I made a sincere effort to record some of this early morning music. After a series of unrewarding attempts, however, and under extremely unpleasant conditions, I allowed the Indians to greet the day without the nuisance of my presence. My informants all told me, however, that the songs had no meaning, and, as far as the words were concerned, I am inclined to believe that this is true. In discussing the question with Abraham Richards, the son of an American cattle rancher who was born and raised with a group of Siriono on his father's cattle ranch near El Carmen, he told me that he, also, was never able to make any sense out of these early morning songs. However that may be, on inquiring of informants as to why they always greeted the day with songs, one of two reasons was always given; either they were happy or they were like the birds ('Hadn't I noticed that most of the birds and some of the animals greeted the day with song?'). Singing in the morning thus may perform the function not only of pleasantly filling in the period between darkness and dawn, after sufficient sleep has been obtained and before the activities of the day begin, but also of reinforcing the bonds maintained with the animal world."

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1: Holmberg--47 [8]
116, 825

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

"The habits of animals—what they eat, where they sleep, when they have their young, etc.—are common knowledge to every boy of 12."

"Except for being subject to certain food taboos, the normal life of a woman is little upset during pregnancy. She goes about her regular work until shortly before the time of her delivery. She may not eat coati lest the infant be born with sores and a very long head. The guan, the howler monkey, the macaw, and the toucan are taboo on the grounds that if they are eaten the infant will cry a great deal when it is born. Likewise forbidden is the meat of the armadillo. A violation of this taboo will cause the infant to have great fear like the armadillo, which crosses its arms in its hole when it is caught. Other forbidden foods include the owl monkey, whose meat cannot be eaten lest the infant inherit its tendency not to sleep at night; the anteater, porcupine, and honey bear, lest the infant be born clubfooted; the jaguar, lest the infant be stillborn; turtle eggs, lest the mother have a miscarriage or be unable to deliver the infant and die; and the harpy eagle, because it is taboo for all people except the aged.

Some of these food taboos are generalized to the father, but not all of them. The only ones which he usually observes are the restrictions on eating harpy eagle, anteater, and howler monkey, which in a strict sense are not pregnancy taboos, since these animals are never supposed to be eaten by anyone but an old person. However, these food taboos seem to be more carefully observed by the men when their wives are pregnant."

1: Holmberg--66 [4]
116, 825, 843

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

"A woman's diet during pregnancy, however, is not much reduced by the above-mentioned food taboos. She is allowed to eat all vegetable foods, fruits, and fish. In addition, she still has a wide selection among meat foods, of which the following are the principal ones: tortoise, turtle, curassow, duck, cormorant, spider monkey, capuchin monkey, squirrel, peccary, tapir, agouti, capybara, paca, alligator, hawk, vulture, and marsh deer. Such animals as the tapir and peccary are especially favored because they are regarded as valiant and industrious, and if their flesh is eaten one's children will grow up to be like them."

"To prevent the occurrence of miscarriage a woman must be careful not to eat the flesh of an animal to which some parallel experience has happened. One day Ndekai, one of my male informants, had several tortoises hanging by lianas from a beam in the house. Early in the morning of the following day it was found that one of these tortoises had 'dropped' her eggs on the floor during the night, and that they were broken. The tortoise was cooked and eaten immediately, but Ndekai's wife would have no part of the flesh. She told me that if she partook of any of this tortoise she would have a miscarriage—that she would 'drop' her child in the same manner as the tortoise had 'dropped' its eggs."

1: Holmberg--77-78
116, 262, 825, 858, 862

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

"Food habits are among the first patterns of behavior that every young child must learn. After weaning, taboo foods are simply withheld from a child, but as he grows older and more omnivorous, [78] he is threatened with disease and abandonment if he partakes of forbidden foods to which he may be exposed while his parents are not around. The list of foods taboo to him, however, is not long. Among the animals he must never eat is the harpy eagle. This taboo is easy to obey, since this bird is rarely bagged; only two were shot during my residence at Tibaera. The harpy eagle is regarded as the king of the birds by the Siriono, and the eating of its flesh is believed to cause illness (it is never stated what kind) to anyone but an old person. Likewise taboo until one is aged are the anteater, lest one sire or give birth to clubfooted children, and the howler monkey, because it is an 'old' animal with a beard and therefore dangerous to eat when one is young. Children are also forbidden the meat of the owl monkey, lest they spend sleepless nights and be restless, and the coati, lest they break out with sores on their bodies. Embryos and the young offspring of animals also cannot be eaten by children, lest they have miscarriages in adulthood."

"Following these rites in the forest, the girls are not immediately available for intercourse and marriage. They must wait until their hair has again grown to the length of their chins, which takes about a year. During this time they are subjected to the following food taboos. They cannot eat guan, macaw, monkey, curassow, toucan, anteater, coati, harpy eagle, parrot, paca, armadillo, opossum, porcupine, fox, and eggs of any kind. The reasons for not allowing them to eat these foods were never made clear to me except in the case of eggs, which are believed to cause multiple births, and porcupine and anteater, which are believed to cause the birth of clubfooted children. The following foods, however, are not taboo: all vegetable foods, fruits, fish, tortoise, peccary, tapir, deer, agouti, duck, alligator, cormorant, otter, and squirrel."

1: Holmberg--84 [2]
116, 789, 825, 884

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

"Besides being a rejuvenation ceremony and a mark of adulthood, hidai-idákwa is also believed to insure the supply of food. Kénda told me that during the ceremony the animals all come near the house to see the men gaily attired with feathers and uruku, and to hear them sing. Therefore, when the men go out to hunt after hidai-idákwa, they always encounter game."

"A dying individual, unless he is a child, is given little attention. His near relatives, however, generally assemble to watch him breathe his last. The women mourners sit on the ground around him and weep profusely, but the men show few signs of grief. They usually squat around him and silently smoke their pipes. When a great hunter is dying, however, fellow tribesmen sometimes squat around him and ask him to pass them some of his luck. If, for instance, he was a great hunter of tapir in his day, they may ask him, 'Grandfather, where can we find tapir?' He usually answers, 'After I die go to (such and such a place) when the sun is rising and you will find tapir.' On the sunrise following the disposal of the corpse, the men set out for the spot designated and often find a tapir there."